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In some sections of the country the village elders try to keep the children away from the dead, lest their "k'las" should be induced to follow its "k'la." In order to divert the attention of the latter from prevailing on the shade of some living person to follow it, the elders pretend to pick up fruit about the room where the body is lying and to put it into the skirts of their garments.

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In the Pegu Hills it is customary to prepare a bier for the body. This is a low bamboo frame ("thi hso law") with a bamboo framework above, over which a blanket or several garments are spread to form a canopy ("ta t' su"). By this means the spirit is supposed to be assured a cool and shady journey to its next abode. The body is usually kept only from one to three days, at the end of which time bits of the finger and toe-nails are pared off and a lock of the hair is cut to be placed in a tiny mat and substituted for the corpse during the remaining days of the funeral rites, and the "mourners" march around them as they would around the corpse itself.

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A ceremony, called "ta le me" or the lighting of the way, takes place in the evening. The Karen people seem to think of the realm of death as quite the reverse of this world. I have sometimes thought that they locate it beneath the earth, but am not sure whether they ascribe a location to it or not. Their conception of the conditions prevailing in the other sphere as opposed to those existing in this one, is shown by the following observance: Two young men take their places on opposite sides of the corpse, one holding a candle between his first and second fingers, as a cigar is held, the palm of the hand being downward. He passes the candle to his fellow, who passes it back, the recipient taking it between the third and fourth digits. The candle is then thrown down beneath the house, while the young men raise their hands and point to the sky, saying to the corpse: "The roots of your trees are there," and then to the ground with the words: "There are the tops of your trees." Pointing in the direction of the source of the neighboring stream, they call it the mouth of the river and then pointing to its mouth, they speak of it as the source.

After this the company file around the body, chanting a "hta" (poem) to the sun. In Siam it is the custom to march around to the left, making the circuit three times, after which the participants begin to recite the following version of this "hta," entitled "The Face of the Sun":

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"The sun is dark; dark is the sun.
The moon is dark; dark is the moon.
The face of the sun is black. We point to the plantain.
The tops of your trees are the roots.
The mouths of your rivers have become their sources."

"The face of the sun shines.
The sun rises and reveals himself.
The moon ascends and displays herself.
They sink into the great river,
Setting among the fragrant flowers,
Where the perfumes are most satisfying."

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No regular order of funeral ceremonies appears to be observed throughout the Karen country. Not only do different tribes have their particular customs, but also various groups within the same tribe differ more or less from one another. This wide variety of rites renders it almost impossible to ascertain what the original customs were. On the plains, where the Karen have come into contact with the Burmese, the old customs have largely disappeared and are known only through the reports of old men. Even in the hill-country some of the ancient customs have been discontinued, so that one rarely sees a funeral nowadays at which all of the rites mentioned in this chapter are observed.[3]

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Nevertheless, it seems to have been a universal custom for the elders to take a leading part in the ceremonies by chanting a poem in which they declare that the spirit of the deceased has left this sphere for another and a better life in the spirit-world. A poem of this import is still recited in Siam and is probably not widely different from that which was familiar to the various tribes in the early days. It runs as follows:

"On the other side of the great river [4]
The apes call loudly to each other and cry.
They cry, 'tis said, because death comes so readily:
Men vanish like water rolling from the caladium leaf;[5]
They enter life suddenly and die quickly.
One by one they tread in the steps of God's sons.
They return whence they came as attendants of God;
They spread his mat and roll his cigars."

[3] At a funeral which the writer attended in the Pegu Hills in 1917 only a few of the elders, and a young man who had come from Papun, could repeat the "htas" which were used in the ceremonies. The young folks of the village itself could only be persuaded to take part after much talking, and then they appeared to be ashamed and shy. Only one night did they attempt to recite the poems, and the next morning the corpse was taken out through the side of the house and carried to the burial place where, they told me, no further rites were observed.

[4] This fabulous great river is supposed to separate this world from the next.

[5] A drop of water rolls from the axil of a caladium leaf like a drop of mercury.

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FUNERAL CUSTOMS

"The Lord of death, does his work swiftly.
The servants of Death are prompt in their task.
By the light of dawn they sharpen their spears.
In the ev'ning glow they whet them again.
They ponder where they will go to fight.
They choose whom they will overcome.
They steal through the vales and over the hills.
They vanquish the sons and daughters of men.
Into the huts of the poor, among the fowls,
Into the great houses and into the guest-rooms,
Where the oblations of brass and silver are seen
And the fowls are killed and offered, they come."

"Go, kill a black chicken.
Prepare it and offer it.
Go forth, and offer it on the main road,
At the intersection of the main roads.
If the curious person should eat it,
We would say that our grief has gone to him;
That he has carried it a great distance.
Let not evil's combings fall on us.
Let them fall 'midst the trees of the woods
Or elsewhere: the country is spacious."

Other verses are chanted, among them the following taken from what is known as a great poem ("hta mo pgha"):

"In the beginning when men first worked,
They toiled as their discernment led them.
From the beginning they worked for you;
They worked; they talked; they chanted."

A small poem ("hta hpo") supplies its lessons also:

"No more will you wear the beads,
But be draped in tendrils of the banyan.
Instead of the jacket and loin-cloth
You will wear the leaves of the banyan.
Go hence, eat the sour fruit of hades
And honey from the comb of the bees."

"Go, eat the salt fruit down in hades.
Go before and eat of the honey.
The dead, who face toward the ridge-pole,
Leave all of their children behind them.
They die and must look up the ladder,
But leave all their labor behind them.
Their death makes life not easy for us:
They send us on many an errand;
Our feet and our backs become weary."

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764 524 dry supplies. The members of the party who are impersonating women, go under the houses and pretend to catch fish in their nets. By such methods they manage to gather all they can carry of fruit, vegetables, and other kinds of food, which they consume on their return to the place where the funeral is being held. This ceremony is performed more frequently when the bones of the deceased are exhumed than at the time of his death.

764 761 [342] After the ordinary daylight observances and the chanting of the poems in the evenings have been completed, the body is removed through an opening made for the purpose in the side of the house and is carried to the place where it is to be burned or buried. In the olden days it was usual to burn the body, but latterly burial is the common practice. The children used to be confined or tied [859] up at home during the removal of the corpse. This was to prevent their being scared by the gruesome sight, thus causing their shades or "k'las" to withdraw from their bodies and make them sick, or to keep their "k'las" from being enticed to follow that of the dead person with the same result.

764 775 In Siam three beds of leaves and twigs are made along the path to the place of burning, the bearers stopping at these piles as though to put down their burden and rest, but allowing it barely to touch the bed when they raise it again and go on.

In those cases in which burning is resorted to, the body is placed upon a pile of fagots three or four feet high and more wood is piled on top. Dry bamboo torches are applied at two or more places and, after the fire is blazing, the body is pierced with long sharpened bamboos to allow the juices to exude and so hasten the process of incineration. Before the body has been wholly consumed, charred pieces of the bones and particularly of the skull are raked out, held near the fire, and addressed with the words: "If you are hot, sit by the fire." After this water is poured over them and they are told, if cold, to bathe and drink water. These injunctions to the bones again illustrate the curious conception on the part of the Karen that the conditions prevailing in the next world are just the reverse of those existing in the present one.

If the full funeral rites have been performed, the bones are ready to be deposited in the family burial-ground. If, however, the cremation has taken place before the performance of the full ceremonies, the bones are usually placed in a basket or wrapped in a cloth and taken home to be used again when the full rites are celebrated. This carrying home of the relics and celebrating a funeral

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later is called "ta hu taw pgha a' hki." It is done both on the plains and in the hills. If the person dies in the rainy or the harvest season, the practice is to dispose of the body quickly and hold the burial rites, namely, the games and recitation of the poems or "htas" at a more convenient time.

On their way back from the burning-place the people stop at intervals, look back, wave their hands, and call out: "Pru-r-r k'la, come back, come back." They are summoning their own "k'las" to keep them from remaining behind with that of the dead person. In order to prevent the "k'la" of the deceased from following after them, they set up branches of trees in the path, which is their method of warning friends not to take a certain path. In Siam the funeral party resort to the additional precaution of opening the trunk of a big rotten tree in the jungle the next morning and summoning the "k'la" of the deceased to abide in that. Having provided an offering of rice and water for the nourishment of the spirit here, they address the tree as follows:

"O Rotten Tree, you know hades and the land of the dead.
Be kind enough to show the deceased the way thither."

But few localities are left where the Karen still keep up their old burial-places. These localities are in the hills and on the eastern border of Burma. In these regions an elder of the bereaved family, who is familiar with the burial-place, takes the bones and valuables of the deceased, such as beads, ornaments, etc., to the spot and deposits them with the ashes of his ancestors. A man in the employ of a timber contractor told me of a chance visit made by him to one of these sacred burial-places. With a Karen driver he was in search of a working elephant that had strayed away. After crossing two or three mountain ridges and the intervening valleys, the Karen remarked that they were approaching his ancestral burial-spot and consented to lead his companion to it. They climbed to the top of the next ridge, where the ground was covered with huge boulders. Threading their way among these, they emerged into a grassy plot in the midst of which lay a boulder larger than the others, and, after clambering to the top of this rock, they found therein a deep hole in which the family relics of the elephant driver were deposited. His companion thrust the shaft of his spear nearly its whole length into the hole, the mouth of which was not more than four of five inches in diameter, and, poking about, could hear

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764 the jingling of silver, probably bracelets, beads, rings, and other jewelry. It is said that hollow trees and the limestone caves that are so common in the hills of Burma and Siam, contain many such hidden treasures. In the Pegu Hills the people appear to bury the relics of their dead wherever fancy dictates and to pay no further attention to the spot. Indeed, as a whole the Karen raise no monuments over their dead. When the remains of a woman are buried, not only her trinkets and ornaments are buried with her, but also her pigs and fowls which, as her peculiar property, are killed and deposited with her relics.

766 Both in the hills and on the plains it is the custom to dig up
775 the bones of the dead who have been carried off by epidemics, as well as of those who have died at inconvenient times, and hold ceremonies over them. It is said that in Shwegyin December ("La plü"), which is the month of eclipses and of the dead, is the time when these ceremonies are usually performed. On the plains the months of the hot season are those chosen for these rites.

When the bones are brought back to serve as the center of the burial ceremonies, they are placed in a little basket and set within [346] a small enclosure. In the Pegu Hills they are put under a small canopy, but on the plains the receptacle for them is made in the form of a miniature pagoda ("hko so law") or a little hut ("hko saw"). The hut is a model of a house with its ladder, water pots, etc. The basket containing the bones is put into the hut, and one end of a string is tied to the basket and the other let down into a water jar under the miniature house. This arrangement makes it possible for the "k'la" of the deceased to go down for a drink whenever it is thirsty. Early in the morning one of the elders carries a firebrand out to the hut, which is usually situated outside of the village. There he lifts out a piece of the bone and heats it with the glowing brand, saying: "If you are hot, sit by the fire." Then he pours water over it and tells it to drink and bathe, if it is cold. This he does in turn with each fragment of the bone. Finally, he puts the firebrand under the hut, calls back his own "k'la," and returns home. On top of the hut an image of a parrot is left, in case the deceased is an unmarried person; but for married persons two such images are set up. These birds are supposed to help carry the spirit of the deceaseed to its next abiding-place. As long as the bones are in the hut the friends take food to the "k'la" every day.

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If the deceased is unmarried, the friends sometimes chant poems deriding him for dying before he has left any offspring to perpetuate his stock on earth. When they are ready to carry the hut to the grave, they remove the image of the parrot ("t'le") and bury it at the fork of the roads with its head towards the jungle, probably so that it will fly in that direction and carry the "k'la" of the deceased into the woods. On their return the love poems ("na do") are chanted by the young men and maidens, and early next morning the hut with the little basket of bones inside is taken to the back of the usual burying-place and left there. The funeral party stops long enough to say: "We have brought you here with all your belongings. Remain here." On their way home they do not forget to call their "k'las" frequently, lest these should be tempted to stay behind. In the case of the burial of married persons the mourners cook eggs, rice, and curry and spread a feast near the hut. They request the spirit of the dead to come and eat and then to depart to the king of spirits, "Mü Hka," and not to return. The hut and its contents are then removed to the burial-place and left there. The closing ceremony is one performed over the bones at noon of the last day of the rites, its object being to discover whether the "k'la" of the departed has yet reached the land of delight whence it will not return, or whether it is still wandering around and, therefore, liable to entice away the "k'las" of its relatives and friends. This final ceremony is called "t'yaw lo ke a' k'la." A slender bamboo or stock of elephant grass is stuck in the ground obliquely near the foot of the hut, and from its top is suspended a newly spun cotton string on which is tied a piece of the charred bone of the dead person and below it a bit of cotton wool. Four or five more pieces of bone separated by bits of the wool are strung on the cord, the end of which is attached to a gold or yellow bracelet. Directly under the bracelet a cup containing a boiled duck egg and a lump of cooked rice is set. The relatives now sit down and chant a poem or "hta," in which their love for the deceased is expressed. Then each member of the family strikes the cup and bracelet a gentle blow and, calling the dead by name, asks his spirit to return. If nothing unusual happens, they know that it has arrived at its destination and will never come back again. If, however, the string vibrates considerably or breaks, as may happen, when somebody taps the bracelet there is great lamentation for they are then convinced that the "k'la" is present and has descended

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the string. Hence, offerings of food must be continued to prevent the "k'la" from exercising its enticing power on that of some living relative.

The "k'las" of the children are thought to be especially susceptible to such influence, and among the Bwes extraordinary precautions are taken to protect the children. The Bwe grandmother, who is head of the "Bgha" feast, wraps a pair of fowls in a number of garments, each of her grandchildren supplying one. She then calls back the spirits of the children to prevent them from being attracted by the "Mü xa." After the necks of the fowls have been wrung their flesh is eaten by the family, while the "Mü xa" are supposed to feed upon the essence of the chickens.

The Karen bury their children soon after death, and seem to take no further notice of their passing. When parents have had the misfortune to lose several of their offspring shortly after birth, they believe that the spirits from some vague region have sought mortal birth through their instrumentality, simply to gain the ornaments and trinkets that Karen are in the habit of giving to their children. Having secured these coveted possessions, the spirits return to their former abode with their undeserved rewards. The Karen call this fleeting existence "ta plu aw ka," which means "gaining something by entering life." Parents thus taken advantage of, as they feel, have recourse to a revolting method of terrifying a spirit of this greedy type. After a child has died and been carried to the burial-place, the indignant father thrusts a spear or sword through and through the little body or slashes it with a "dah," that is, a long knife, in the hope that the spirit, seeing how badly its temporary mortal tenement is being treated, may fear to come back again.

Our study of funeral customs among the Karen shows that, in the case of adults at least, funerals are festal and feasting occasions. Much rice and pork curry are consumed and, in the olden time, liquor flowed freely. In earlier times when people of different villages met at a funeral, a spirit of rivalry was shown in the improvising and chanting of the poems and sometimes in other ways. I have in my possession an old bronze funeral drum, which was reputed to be the sweetest sounding drum in the hills at the head of Thonze Creek.[4] On its rim "dah" cuts appear which are the lasting marks of a fight in which rival groups of villagers engaged

[4] See Chapter XIII on Bronze Drums, pp. 121-123.

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The Continuity of Life

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The Karen do not appear to have conceived the idea of an immortal life. They speak of "k' las" in "plu" (hades) as dying, when the "k' las" are believed to enter an intermediate stage of existence, becoming "sgheu." These "sgheu" are represented as something like eggs or bladders filled with a vaporous substance. When, later, these vapor-filled objects burst, their contents spread over the fields; and the developing flowers of the paddy and other plants are thereby fertilized, for the vapor contains the fructifying principle. When the grain is eaten as food, its life-giving power is communicated to the blood. Thence, it is imparted to the seminal fluid, by means of which men and animals are enabled to propagate life. The transmission of life from shades or ghosts back to life again is expressed in Karen speech by the root "lo," which signifies to expose or open one thing to the influence of another. Inasmuch as the fecundating of the paddy takes place in the rainy season, the "Law hpo," a company of demons who regulate the rainfall, are supposed to act as agents in bringing it about. When the kernels are forming in the heads of the paddy, the Karen are wont to say: "Bu deu htaw li," which means literally, "The paddy has conceived." [16]

[16] See Chapter XXII on Supernatural and Mythical Beings, p. 280.

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offerings are made to her, and the rim of earth that encircles the entrance to crabs' burrows is placed on top of the paddy pile and in the bin in her honor.[5]

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"Hkū Te" is the lord of the region of death, the king of hades. His origin is explained as follows: A couple dwelling in the spirit

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A Bwe Karen Christian Village, Toungoo District
The Karen still love to build their houses as close together as possible.

realm once plotted to slay and devour their son-in-law. Accordingly, they turned themselves into giant winding creepers hanging across the road by which their intended victim was returning from his field, carrying a basket of paddy. Instead of attempting to pass under the vines, as he was expected to do, the son-in-law severed them with his sickle. One of the creepers, the wife, immediately flew upward to the sky and became a rainbow, while the other penetrated the earth, resumed his original form as a man, and became king of hades. There he receives the souls of mortals and rules over the dead. As judge of those under his authority he grants permission to the ones that have lived worthily to enter the higher realms, but he condemns to the lowest hell those of base lives. No offerings are made to this Karen Pluto.

[5] See *ante*, p. 62. An account of the ceremonies performed in connection with the cultivation of paddy occupies pp. 54-62. The myth concerning "Hpi Bi Yaw" resembles more or less that of the Irish and Scotch corn maidens, Kernaby, and suggests that of the Roman Ceres and the Greek Demeter: Sir J. G. Frazer, "The Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild," in *The Golden Bough*, Vols. VII and VIII.

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"Hkū Te" is to be seen as a rainbow in the west occasionally. At such times, according to one version of the legend, he is lowering a tube through which to drink the liquor provided at wedding-feasts. When a rainbow appears in the west early in the morning, the king of hades is again in the sky, this time setting up a funeral post ("t le") for his children.[6] From this it seems that he has had several offspring, but his wife has never borne him any since their son-in-law thwarted their plot against his life in the remote past. The funeral post is intended to remind men that many persons have died without receiving proper burial ceremonies. Such neglect entails some sort of a calamity. Hence, the Karen are stricken with terror when they observe the rainbow arching the western heavens early in the morning, especially if this sign is accompanied by thunder and earthquake. Under such circumstances they will not go to their work, for it is tabu.[7] If a Karen should point at such a rainbow, he would at once thrust his finger into his navel in order to avoid the loss of the offending member. This act is called "ugh de de."

The people say of the rainbow in the east that at the time "Teu Kweh," wife of "Hkū Te," became the bow of promise in the sky she was pregnant, and, being now separated from the earth, she is seen from time to time in the east going to draw water for herself. The souls of women who die with child are supposed to have no other means of obtaining drink, except from the rainbow divinity. When two rainbows appear in the east, the upper and larger one is her husband, who is visiting with her.

The second group of spirits among the Karen comprises those who have spent some time on earth as human beings, but have not gained entrance into the realm of the dead because they were denied funeral rites either on account of their bad character or on account of their having died by violence. Hence they are doomed to wander about, avenging themselves upon mortals. As they are supposed to be particularly occupied with this mission at nightfall, the Karen think it imprudent to be out during the early evening.

This division consists of three groups of beings. The first are "Th' re ta hka," or ghosts of those who have died violent deaths or have been carried off by epidemics of cholera, smallpox, etc. and could not, therefore, be given proper funeral ceremonies. They are believed to bring violent deaths and epidemics upon mortals, prob-

[6] See Chapter XX on Funeral Customs, p. 200.
[7] See Chapter XXVIII on Tabu, p. 220.

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ably in revenge for the manner of their own taking-off. The second group is made up of those who were notoriously evil in the earthly life and suffered capital punishment for their crimes, and of those who as chiefs were known to be tyrants. This group as a whole is called "Ta mū xa." [8] Its members appear in the forms of giants and goblins or of Burman "pongyis" (Buddhist monks) and are usually seen by sick persons whose spirits ("k'las") they are seeking and on which they subsist.[9] These demons are attended by dogs in the form of woodpeckers. According to a legend two men, who were detained in the forest until night, heard a woodpecker call, and immediately thereafter they heard some ghosts say that the dog had barked. One of the men shouted, but they could distinguish nothing but some remark about monkeys, followed by the sound of a bowstring. The pair being thus discovered by the woodpecker, which was evidently with the demons, were stricken with a chill and died the next morning. Consequently, when a Karen hears the scream of this bird of ill-omen, he calls out:

"Shun me; stay far off.
Go thine own way; keep thine own road."

The third group of the ghosts of mortals consists of those who, through some accident, have been deprived of the funeral ceremonies. This group was discovered ages ago through the distressing experience of a certain patriarch, who came upon the body of a Talain who had been struck by lightning. He carried off the skull, took it home, and put it up over his fireplace. During the night the death's-head assumed human form and wandered all over the house, thereby striking terror into the members of the family. Before morning it resumed its former shape. The ghosts of people thus accidentally killed and left unburied are called "Ta t' hka" or "Ta s' hka." They inspire the Karen with horror, a fact taken advantage of by some miscreants who work evil on their enemies by means of a skull kept for the purpose. However, such working of evil falls within the realm of magic.[10]

The third general division of spirits comprises a heterogeneous lot of divinities, who exercise more or less influence on the life and prosperity of men. Some of these may have been inherited from

[8] The Karen designation of this group differs in pronunciation from that of the celestial beings (Mū xa) not only in having three syllables, but also in that its last syllable has the grave or heavy tone, while in the latter case "xa" is given the rising or light tone.

[9] For the rites in connection with these, see p. 248.

[10] See Chapter XXVI on Magic, p 274.